United Nations A/C.5/55/SR.44

General Assembly
Fifty-fifth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
22 March 2001

Original: English

**Fifth Committee**

**Summary record of the 44th meeting**

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 13 March 2001, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Rosenthal ..... (Guatemala)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions*: Mr. Mselle

## Contents

Election of a Vice-Chairman

Organization of work

Agenda item 117: Programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (*continued*)

*Integrated Management Information System*

*Asbestos problem*

*Facilities management*

*Task force on common services*

*Profitability of commercial activities*

*Security arrangements*

*Construction of additional conference facilities at Addis Ababa*

*Internal and external printing practices*

Agenda item 116: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

01-28419 (E)

Agenda item 123: Human resources management (*continued*)

*Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on senior-level appointments*

Agenda item 120: Administrative and budgetary coordination of the United Nations with the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency

*The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.*

**Election of a Vice-Chairman**

1. **The Chairman** said he had been informed that the Group of Asian States had nominated Mr. Ramesh Chandra (India) to replace Mr. Park Hae-yun (Republic of Korea) as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, following Mr. Park' s resignation. He took it that the Committee wished to elect Mr. Chandra by acclamation.

2. *It was so decided.*

**Organization of work** (A/C.5/55/L.39/Rev.1 and L.40/Rev.1)

3. **The Chairman** drew attention to documents A/C.5/55/L.39/Rev.1 and L.40/Rev.1, which contained, respectively, a list of the documents to be considered by the Fifth Committee during the first part of the resumed fifty-fifth session and the revised proposed programme of work of the Fifth Committee for that part of the resumed session.

4. **Mr. Norström** (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey and, in addition, Iceland and Norway, recalled that the European Union, in its opening statement under the agenda item on human resources management during the main part of the current session, had indicated that the action taken and the changes proposed by the Secretary-General in document A/55/253 were essential for the continued improvement of the delivery and practical effectiveness of United Nations programmes, since they would give the Organization' s managers true decision-making power, a sense of accountability and highly qualified staff. Since the Organization' s staff were its greatest asset, they should be at the centre of the Committee' s concerns.

5. The European Union was pleased with the proposed programme of work. Since a number of issues included in the programme had already been discussed during the main part of the current session, the Committee should be able to reach decisions on them by the end of the first part of the resumed session. The European Union attached great importance to the application of Article 19 of the Charter, and looked forward to the report to be submitted by the Committee on Contributions on the implementation of the General Assembly's recent decision to change the way in which that Article was applied. During the current part of the resumed session, the Committee should avoid holding night and weekend meetings to ensure that small delegations could participate fully in the deliberations.

6. **The Chairman** said that there were no plans to hold night or weekend meetings, which would entail the expenditure of additional resources. He took it that the Committee wished to adopt the proposed programme of work contained in document A/C.5/55/L.40/Rev.1, on the understanding that it would be adjusted as needed in the course of the resumed session.

7. *It was so decided.*

**Agenda item 117: Programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001** (*continued*)

*Integrated Management Information System* (A/55/7/Add.8 and A/55/632)

*Asbestos problem* (A/55/7/Add.1 and A/55/135)

*Facilities management* (A/54/628; A/55/7/Add.1 and A/55/210)

*Task force on common services* (A/55/7/Add.1 and A/55/461)

*Profitability of commercial activities* (A/55/7/Add.1 and A/55/546)

*Security arrangements* (A/55/511)

*Construction of additional conference facilities at Addis Ababa* (A/55/7/Add.7 and A/55/493)

*Internal and external printing practices* (A/55/7/Add.1 and A/55/132)

8. **Mr. Niwa** (Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services) introduced the Secretary-General' s twelfth progress report on the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) project (A/55/632). In January 2001, after the issuance of that report, the pay for all Secretariat staff on the Headquarters payroll had begun to be processed through IMIS. The new payroll system was very complex, as it involved some 10,000 staff members at about 100 locations around the world, and payments were being processed in more than 50 currencies.

However, the transition to the new system had been smooth, and the staff welcomed the new software, which provided detailed information on all elements of their pay. The finance applications had been successfully implemented at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and, once they had been implemented at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) in the first half of 2001, personnel and financial processing throughout the Secretariat would be completely standardized. The development phase of IMIS had been completed. Its successful implementation had confirmed the validity of the incremental approach taken and of the system as a whole.

9. Current efforts focused on keeping the IMIS software up to date and in line with the current technology, such as by upgrading the technological platform and prototyping the system as a World Wide Web application. Work was also being done to ensure remote access to the system under particularly difficult communications conditions. IMIS would be the main component of the "electronic United Nations" to be implemented incrementally over the next two years. It had streamlined and standardized processes, provided detailed and timely information which had never been available before and introduced modern technologies into the Secretariat. In addition, it had provided all offices away from Headquarters with the same sophisticated management tools, which the duty stations themselves would not have been able to develop, implement and maintain individually. The Secretariat's experience with the introduction of new information technology had been unusually successful.

10. The Secretary-General's report on asbestos management at overseas properties and at the locations of the regional commissions (A/55/135) indicated that asbestos-containing materials had been used, to varying degrees, at all the United Nations complexes in Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and at the regional commissions. The report outlined the measures taken or foreseen in connection with the long-term plans at each location.

11. The Secretary-General's report on facilities management (A/54/628) provided updated information on the major global properties owned, leased or rented at principal duty stations and regional commissions, including the current replacement value of each property and issues related to the long-range maintenance, alteration, improvement and expansion of existing buildings. In total, the Organization owned, or leased at nominal cost, some 175 hectares of land and 1.1 million square metres of building floor area, which represented a major physical asset, since their replacement value was more than $5 billion. Their maintenance and improvement would have a significant impact on the Secretariat's efficiency in serving the Organization's needs. According to the report, however, the chronic shortage of funding for those purposes must be addressed before serious operational problems became worse, and long-term needs must be addressed through a capital master plan. A schematic design for such a plan for Headquarters was currently being prepared with a view to correcting many of the problems which had developed over the past 50 years.

12. Document A/55/210 described the Overseas Properties Management and Information Exchange Network (OPMIEN), whereby designated staff at Headquarters and at other duty stations would regularly exchange information and would develop common policies, procedures and best practices. That approach would ensure faster and more efficient coordination of major facilities management issues. Funding for OPMIEN would be included in the regular budget for Headquarters and for each of the duty stations. The Network's first meeting had been held in New York in February 2000, and the second meeting would be hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome in May 2001. The response, thus far, had been very positive; even specialized agencies had joined the Secretariat and the funds and programmes in sharing information.

13. The summary report on common services (A/55/461) provided information on the progress made in implementing the reform measures announced in March 1997, identified key achievements and addressed the various constraints encountered. The Task Force on Common Services, which consisted of senior representatives of the funds and programmes and of various Secretariat departments, had set up working groups which had helped to harmonize procurement services, personnel services, archives and records management and travel and transport services. In addition, enhanced global networking in the areas of security services and facilities management had resulted in the active participation of several specialized agencies in OPMIEN and in the Inter-Agency Security Networking Group. Regular contacts

would be maintained with bodies such as the United Nations Development Group, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) and the Inter-Agency Procurement Working Group (IAPWG).

14. The report on proposed measures to improve the profitability of the commercial activities of the United Nations (A/55/546) should be considered in conjunction with the Secretary-General's forthcoming report on a proposed new visitors' experience. The key recommendation of the current report was that commercial activities should be managed separately from the core activities of the Secretariat. The various commercial activities were managed by either the Department of Public Information or the Office of Central Support Services; the efforts of the Department and the Office would be incorporated into a single plan. Since the ability to respond expeditiously to changes in markets was essential to the success of commercial enterprises, the financial reporting structure would be reviewed to make it more responsive to market conditions.

15. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) introduced the Secretary-General's report on the internal and external printing practices of the Organization (A/55/132). Section II of the report provided analytical data on printing activities at Headquarters, and section III provided similar information on printing activities at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG). Sections IV and V provided information on printing practices in the funds, programmes and specialized agencies. The report concluded that, over the last three bienniums, there had been a steady reduction in the internal and external printing programmes at Headquarters and in Geneva, which had reduced the costs of internal and external printing by 20 and 35 per cent, respectively. That had resulted from better management of those activities, closer monitoring of requirements and the introduction of modern technologies. The Secretariat would continue to streamline its printing practices to make better use of available capacity at Headquarters and in Geneva, while ensuring that the needs of Member States were fully met.

16. The report on security arrangements at UNOG (A/55/511) provided information not only on the current situation, but also on a security concept for the Office which had been developed by a task force consisting of representatives of UNOG and the Swiss authorities. The additional costs involved in the implementation of the security concept would be borne by the United Nations and the host country; the United Nations would bear the cost of upgrading the security infrastructure inside the United Nations compound. Those additional requirements, estimated at $2.7 million, would be addressed in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2002-2003.

17. The report on the construction of additional conference facilities at Addis Ababa (A/55/493), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 39/236, was the final report on that subject, since the project had been completed and its costs had been capitalized in the books of the Organization on 30 June 2000. Paragraphs 7 to 10 of the report concerned proposals for further upgrading the facilities of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). Detailed proposals would be submitted to the General Assembly at a later stage; in the meantime, it was recommended that the fund balance of $7,702,600 should be retained in the construction-in-progress account.

18. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) introduced the Advisory Committee's report on the IMIS project (A/55/7/Add.8). The Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should take note of the Secretary-General's twelfth progress report (A/55/632). It trusted that the Secretariat, in preparing the next progress report, would take into account the observations contained in paragraphs 10 to 12 of its report, and urged the Secretariat to make further progress in implementing IMIS in peacekeeping missions.

19. Document A/55/7/Add.1 contained the Advisory Committee's report on the Secretary-General's reports concerning the asbestos problem (A/55/135), facilities management (A/54/628), overseas properties management (A/55/210), common services (A/55/461), printing practices (A/55/132) and commercial activities of the United Nations (A/55/546). Subject to the comments contained in its report, the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should take note of those reports. It would revisit some of those issues in the context of its consideration of the proposed programme budget for 2002-2003 and future proposed programme budgets. It would revert to the issue of commercial activities once the Secretary-

General's report on a proposed new visitors' experience had been submitted.

20. As noted in its report on the construction of additional conference facilities at Addis Ababa (A/55/7/Add.7), the Advisory Committee agreed that the fund balance of $7.7 million should be retained in the construction-in-progress account, in view of the potential requirements that might arise as a result of the Secretary-General's consideration of additional needs in Addis Ababa.

21. On the issue of upgrading security arrangements at UNOG, the preliminary estimated cost was about $2 million higher than the amounts allocated for 1998-1999 and 2000-2001. The Advisory Committee would revert to the matter in the context of the Secretary-General's proposals under the 2002-2003 budget. In the meantime, the Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should take note of the relevant report of the Secretary-General (A/55/511).

22. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that he appreciated the manner in which the Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services had dealt with the issues raised in connection with the catering services at Headquarters. In particular, he was pleased that the Assistant Secretary-General had provided written confirmation that the coffee shop would continue to operate throughout the year and would remain open when night meetings were being held.

**Agenda item 116: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations** (*continued*)

**Agenda item 123: Human resources management** (*continued*) (A/55/423 and A/55/423/Add.1)

*Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on senior-level appointments*

23. **Mr. Kudryavtsev** (Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)) introduced the JIU report on senior-level appointments in the United Nations and its programmes and funds (A/55/423 and A/55/423/Add.1), which the Joint Inspection Unit had assumed would be considered during the main part of the fifty-fifth session. The Chairman of JIU had officially transmitted the report to the Secretary-General and the executive heads of the programmes and funds on 26 April 2000 and, in accordance with the Statute of JIU, the report, together with the Secretary-General's comments, should have been before the Fifth Committee no later than the end of October 2000. Although the Secretary-General's comments had been submitted at the end of September 2000, regrettably they had not been circulated to delegations until 12 March 2001. Since the report itself had been issued nearly a year earlier, it contained data from 1999 which were no longer current.

24. The report had been prepared on the recommendation of the Open-ended High-level Working Group on the Strengthening of the United Nations System and at the formal suggestion of the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, made in April 1998. It was the first time that the question of senior-level appointments in the United Nations Secretariat had been addressed in a separate report, rather than as one of a range of subjects. The report took into account comments which had frequently been made in the General Assembly, particularly with regard to enhancing transparency, and to ensuring equitable geographical distribution and improving the representation of women in senior-level posts in the Secretariat.

25. The underlying principle of the report was set out in Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations, which was applicable to all staff, including senior staff. Since, under paragraph 1 of that Article, the General Assembly was empowered to formulate regulations for the appointments made by the Secretary-General, the General Assembly was also entitled to amend those regulations in order to reflect new trends in an ever-changing world. At the forefront of those trends were the strengthening of democratic principles and an increase in transparency, including in international organizations. He drew attention to General Assembly resolution 53/221, section I, paragraph 3, according to which proposals on the reform of human resources management requiring an amendment of the regulations and rules or a departure from provisions of prior Assembly resolutions should be submitted to the Assembly for its consideration.

26. The proposal set out in recommendation 1 of the JIU report was a specific example of when such an approach might be taken. It was well known that the current Secretary-General had indicated his resolve to seek the widest possible spectrum of views and to hold consultations with Member States regarding appointments at the Under-Secretary-General and

Assistant-Secretary-General levels (though not at the Director level, as erroneously indicated in paragraph 4 of section II of the Secretary-General's comments (A/55/423/Add.1)). Such a democratic approach to General Assembly decisions should become an integral part of the future practice of the United Nations. Furthermore, it should be noted that the JIU report did not state, contrary to the Secretary-General's assertion in paragraph 4, that appointments at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels were "political".

27. Lastly, a significant part of the JIU report was devoted to the problem of uneven and insufficiently broad geographical distribution of senior-level posts. Thus, in 1999, in the United Nations Secretariat, of 316 posts at the D-1 level or above subject to geographical distribution, 182, or 57.6 per cent had been occupied by nationals of only 18 Member States (less than 10 per cent of the Organization's membership). At the same time, 97 Member States (i.e., more than half the Organization's membership) had not been represented in even one such post (A/55/423, paras. 21 and 22). According to the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat in the year 2000 (A/55/427), of 311 senior-level posts at the D-1 level or above, 175, or 56.2 per cent, had been occupied by nationals of 17 States, while nationals of 79 States had not held a single senior-level post. Thus, some progress had been made, but much remained to be done.

28. Of course, he was not suggesting that senior-level posts could be equally apportioned among all Member States. At the very least, however, there was a need for more vigorous action to remedy the current serious imbalance. One such step was set out in recommendation III of the report, namely, that the Secretary-General should advise in advance Member States of vacancies at the levels of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General. Clearly, all appointments should be made in conformity with Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations.

29. The recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit also addressed the need to improve the representation of women in senior-level posts. He hoped Committee members would study all the recommendations contained in the report.

30. **Mr. Norström** (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the European Union, welcomed the thorough review of the appointment process, since senior management played a crucial role in the work of the Organization. The European Union wished to stress that the Secretary-General was the chief administrative officer of the Organization and that his prerogatives and responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations must be respected.

31. The European Union concurred with the comments made by the Secretary-General in his report (A/55/423/Add.1). It believed that the JIU recommendation to hold consultations with Member States as a requisite part of the selection process might entail unnecessary delays in the appointment process and further politicize the issue. Recommendation II, calling for extensive amendment of staff regulation 4.5, would be contrary to previous efforts by the General Assembly to simplify the Staff Regulations and Rules.

32. In its report, JIU rightly noted the importance of ensuring as wide a geographical mix as possible and increased gender balance at the senior policy-making levels of the Organization. The European Union welcomed the Secretary-General's important efforts to that end.

33. **Mr. Mirmohammed** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, stressed that attending late-night and plenary meetings would be a strain on small delegations. The delay in the submission of the Secretary-General's comments on the JIU report was a matter of concern. That report was clear and concise and its tables were very helpful. It would also be useful to have a written English translation of the Inspector's introductory statement.

34. The Group of 77 and China attached great importance to the issue of equitable geographical representation in senior-level posts, as clearly set out in General Assembly resolutions 53/221 and 51/226. The JIU report was very timely, particularly the information provided in its paragraphs 21 and 22, namely, that fewer than 10 per cent of Member States occupied 57.6 per cent of the senior-level posts.

35. The Group of 77 and China felt the report was constructive and were prepared to endorse its recommendations.

36. **Mr. Fedorov** (Russian Federation) echoed the concerns of other delegations regarding the late circulation of the Secretary-General's comments, which had made it impossible to study them thoroughly. Those comments should have been available at the very

beginning of the fifty-fifth session. His delegation concurred with the Secretary-General's views regarding geographical representation and gender balance in D-2 appointments (A/55/423/Add.1, para. 15) but wondered why he made no specific reference to the recruitment criteria of efficiency, competence and integrity specified in Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations. Lastly, recommendation X was very interesting in the context of the current reform of human resources management.

**Agenda item 120: Administrative and budgetary coordination of the United Nations with the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency** (A/55/525)

37. **Mr. Fareed** (Director of the Office for Inter-agency Affairs) introduced the statistical report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) on the budgetary and financial situation of organizations of the United Nations system (A/55/525), which was the only source of financial data covering the entire United Nations system. It was the sixth report to be presented in the new format introduced at the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly. In keeping with a decision of the General Assembly taken in 1992, the report provided detailed coverage of 1998-1999, which was the most recent period for which there were available audited financial statements for all organizations of the United Nations system. It contained tables covering a 10-year period, including the current biennium. A similar report would be produced in 2002 to cover the biennium 2000-2001.

38. The 10 tables in the report were grouped under the following three subject headings: regular budgets and assessed contributions; working capital funds; and expenditure and receipts of voluntary contributions. Tables 1 to 6 provided data for those organizations with assessed contributions. The percentage assessments in table 3 were payable under approved regular budgets, and in the case of the United Nations, under peacekeeping. Table 4 showed the assessment in dollars for each Member State, and the amounts collected in relation to current assessments and arrears. Information beyond that provided in table 5 could be found in the regular reports of the Committee on Contributions. Tables 7 and 8 covered those organizations receiving voluntary contributions, which included both assessed-contribution organizations receiving extrabudgetary funds and organizations primarily funded by voluntary contributions. Detailed footnotes for each table explained such important issues as the exchange rates used to present data on contributions in currencies other than the United States dollar and fuller definitions of the data provided by each organization.

*The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.*